

19TH CENTURY WARNINGS AGAINST REVISION OF THE KJV

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Many voices were lifted throughout the 19th century against a revision of the King James Bible. I have found roughly 100 books and pamphlets in the British Library and the Cambridge University Library (most of which are now in my personal library) that contain protests against revision by men in England. Other voices were lifted in America on the same theme.

These men defended the King James Bible on the same basis that I defend it today. It was defended on the basis of the superiority of its language, the superiority of the scholarship of its translators, the superiority of its Greek text over the critical text, on the necessity of keeping the old Bible as the one accepted standard, and on the basis of the apostasy of these last days which has so deeply corrupted biblical scholarship, to name a few.

We have given much of this documentation in the hardbound book *For Love of the Bible: The Battle for the King James Bible and the Received Text from 1800 to Present*, which is available from Way of Life Literature.

Consider some examples:

JOHN JEBB (1775-1833)

John Jebb was bishop of Limerick. In 1829 Jebb had stated: "Let individuals give new versions ... but in days of epidemic quackery, let our authorized version be kept inviolate, and guarded as the apple of our eye" (John Jebb, *Life of John Jebb*, ii, p. 454; cited by Samuel Hemphill, *A History of the Revised Version of the New Testament*, pp. 21, 22).

Dr. Jebb continued to oppose the revision of the Authorized Bible. He said that it was "*a fatal thing that a version, of which we have been now in possession for more than 250 years, should be subject to the criticism of this very hasty and not very orthodox age*" (John Stoughton, *Our English Bible*, p. 288).

HENRY JOHN TODD (1763-1845)

Henry Todd was chaplain to the king of England and keeper of the Archbishop of Canterbury's records at Lambeth Palace.

In 1819 Todd published *A Vindication of Our Authorized Translation and Translators of the Bible*. This work was occasioned by the clamor of some who wanted to correct the Received Greek New Testament and the King James Bible on the basis of modern textual criticism. This clamoring gradually increased among a relatively small segment of influential scholars through the 19th century and resulted, ultimately, in the Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament and the English Revised Version of 1881.

Todd understood that modern textual criticism was intimately associated with theological heresy. I searched for Todd's treatise for five years before locating it in the British Library and having a copy made for my personal library.

Consider the following important excerpt: "For when WE SEE MEN OF THE MOST LATITUDINARIAN PRINCIPLES UNIFORMLY PRESSING FORWARD THIS DANGEROUS PROPOSAL; when we see the most unbounded panegyrics [praise] bestowed on THOSE, WHO HAVE CONVERTED THE MOSAIC HISTORY INTO ALLEGORY, AND THE NEW TESTAMENT INTO SOCINIANISM; when we see these attempts studiously fostered, and applauded, by the advocates for this projected [Bible] revision; WE MUST CONJECTURE, THAT SOMETHING MORE IS MEANT THAN A CORRECTION OF MISTAKES, OR AN IMPROVEMENT OF DICTION. Those doctrines, the demolition of which we know to be, in late instances, the grand object of such innovators when they propose alterations in articles of faith, or correction of liturgical forms, are surely in still greater danger when attempted, by the same men, under the distant approaches of a revision of our English Bible (Todd, *A Vindication of Our Authorized Translation and Translators of the Bible*, 1819, pp. 79, 80).

Todd represented the view of many 19th century men who understood that the critical Greek New Testament was a doctrinal issue.

JOSEPH CHARLES PHILPOT (1802-69)

J.C. Philpot was a minister among the Gospel Standard Baptists, Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, and editor of *The Gospel Standard* 1840-1869.

He exhibited a rare combination. He was an Oxford-educated scholar, considered one of the greatest Hebrew and Greek masters of his day, and he was also a deeply spiritual man "with a sanctified discernment of the evil trend of the apostate church."

Writing in the *Gospel Standard* in April 1857, Philpot gave the following testimony to the excellence of the Authorized Version of 1611:

"We cannot but admire the great faithfulness of our translators in so scrupulously adhering to the exact words of the Holy Spirit, and when they were necessarily compelled to supply the ellipses in the original, to point out that they had done so by marking the

word in italic characters. By so doing, they engaged themselves, as by bond, TO GIVE THE WORD OF GOD IN ITS STRICT ORIGINAL PURITY; and yet, as thorough scholars in the original tongues, and complete masters of their own, THEY WERE ENABLED TO GIVE US A VERSION ADMIRABLE NOT ONLY FOR ITS STRICT FIDELITY, BUT FOR ITS ELOQUENCE, GRANDEUR, AND BEAUTY.”

Philpot gave six reasons for rejecting a revision of the King James Bible, and his warnings of what would occur if such a revision were popularized have proven to be uncannily accurate. Consider:

1. Who are to undertake it [a revision of the KJV] ... Of course they must be learned men, great critics, scholars, and divines. BUT THESE ARE NOTORIOUSLY EITHER TAINTED WITH POKERY OR INFIDELITY. Where are the men, learned, yet sound in Truth, not to say alive unto God, who possess the necessary qualifications for so important a work? And can erroneous men, dead in trespasses and sins, carnal, worldly, ungodly persons, spiritually translate a book written by the blessed Spirit? We have not the slightest ground for hope that they would be godly men, such as we have reason to believe translated the Scriptures into our present version.

2. Again, it would unsettle the minds of thousands, as to which was the Word of God—the old translation or the new. What a door it would open for the workings of infidelity, or the temptations of Satan! What a gloom, too, it would cast over the minds of many of God’s saints, to have those passages which had been applied to their souls translated in a different way, and how it would seem to shake all their experience of the power and preciousness of God’s Word!

3. But besides all this, there would be two Bibles spread throughout all the land, the old and the new, and what confusion would this create in almost every place! At present, all sects and denominations agree in acknowledging our present version as to the standard of appeal. Nothing settles disputes so soon as when the contending parties have confidence in the same umpire and are willing to abide by his decision. But this Judge of all dispute, this Umpire of all controversy would cease to be the loser of strife if present acknowledged authority were put an end to by a rival.

4. If the new translation were once to begin, where would it end? It is good to let well enough alone, as it is easier to mar than to mend. ... The Socinianising Neologian would blot out ‘GOD’ in 1 Tim. 3.16, and strike out 1 John 5.7, as an interpolation. The Puseyite would mend it to suit his Tractarian views. ... Once set up a notice, ‘The Old Bible to be mended,’ and there would be plenty of workmen, who trying to mend the cover, would pull the pages to pieces. ... All our good Bible terms would be so mutilated that they would cease to convey the Spirit’s meaning and INSTEAD OF THE NOBLE SIMPLICITY, FAITHFULNESS, AND TRUTH OF OUR PRESENT VERSION, WE SHOULD HAVE A BIBLE THAT NOBODY WOULD ACCEPT AS THE WORD OF

GOD, TO WHICH NONE COULD SAFELY APPEAL, AND ON WHICH NONE IMPLICITLY RELY.

5. Instead of our good old Saxon Bible, simple and solid, with few words obsolete, and alike majestic and beautiful, we should have a modern English translation in pert and flippant language of the day. ...

6. The present English Bible (Authorized Version) ... is, we believe, the grand bulwark of Protestantism; the safeguard of the Gospel, and the treasure of the church; and we should be traitors in every sense of the word if we consented to give it up to be rifled by the sacrilegious hands of the Puseyites [the back to Rome movement within the Church of England], concealed Papists, German Neologians, infidel divines, Arminians, Socinians, and the whole tribe of enemies of God and godliness (Joseph Charles Philpot, "The Authorized Version of 1611," *The Gospel Standard*, April 1857).

More than 150 years ago this man of God understood the intimate association between modern textual criticism and theological modernism and Romanism. He saw the Bible version issue as a doctrine issue. He believed that the removal of "God" from 1 Timothy 3:16 and the Trinitarian statement from 1 John 5:7 was to weaken the theology of the Bible.

JOHN DOWLING (1807-78)

Dowling, who pastored Baptist churches in Rhode Island (Providence) and New York (Broadway Baptist Church, New York City), was the author of the influential *History of Romanism*.

In 1843 Dowling published a defense of the KJV in "*The Burning of the Bibles, Defence of the Protestant Version of the Scriptures Against the Attacks of Popish Apologists for the Champlain Bible Burners* (Philadelphia: Nathan Moore, 1843). This was occasioned by the burning of hundreds of King James Bibles by Jesuit priests in Carbo, New York (near Champlain) in October 1842 and a subsequent newspaper article by a Roman Catholic priest named John Corry in which the accuracy and authority of the King James Bible was attacked. Dowling made the following defense of the KJV: "The Bible which Protestants now use, was translated by order of King James. It was published in A.D. 1611. It is perhaps, the most accurate that has been made, in any language. It is the joint labour of forty seven of the most learned oriental scholars in Europe; men of pure piety and christian honour. They were divided into six companies: each man had his share assigned to him: each company examined each translation made by individuals: each part of the translated Bible was examined, at least, fourteen times: and, was finally, adopted by the companies in full assembly. ... In this, have the defects, and errors of preceding translations, been carefully corrected" (Dowling, pp. 10, 11).

Dowling quoted from seven authorities in praise of the King James Bible, such as John Selden, who said, "The English translation of the Bible is the best translation in the world," and J.W. Whitaker, who said, "It may be compared with any translation in the world without fear of inferiority; it has not shrunk from the most vigorous examination; it challenges investigation, and in spite of numerous attempts to supersede it, it has hitherto remained unrivalled in the affection of the country." Dowling gave his own opinion that "as a whole, I have never yet seen a version which I would be willing to substitute for that as the commonly received version of the mass of the people" (p. 62).

In 1850 John Dowling published *The Old-Fashioned Bible, or Ten Reasons against the Proposed Baptist Version of the New Testament* (New York: Edward H. Fletcher, 1850). It was an edited version of a message he had delivered at Hope Chapel, Broadway, March 31, 1850, and again at First Baptist Church, Brooklyn, pastored by J. L. Hodge. Dowling used the strongest terminology to describe his concern over the new version of the English Bible that had been published by the American and Foreign Bible Society and he exalted the King James Bible in the highest manner:

"The fact is that the common version which it is proposed to amend, is, taken as a whole, a wonderful translation, and although it may be conceded that it is not perfect--for what human performance is so?--yet it is exceedingly doubtful, whether a translation has ever been made from any ancient book, Greek, Latin, or Oriental--which in point of faithfulness to its original can be compared with this, or which has fewer errors in proportion to the entire amount of its contents. ... TO ATTEMPT TO SUPPLANT IT BY A 'NEW VERSION,' OR TO INTRODUCE ANY MATERIAL ALTERATIONS, WOULD BE LIKE 'GILDING REFINED GOLD' ... It is sufficient to say that the hundred thousand of New York Baptists, and the million of American Baptists, have been made so chiefly by means of the good old English Bible. ... In conclusion, then, I say, brethren, sisters and fathers, cling to your old-fashioned Bible!" (*The Old-Fashioned Bible, or Ten Reasons against the Proposed Baptist Version of the New Testament*, 1850, pp. 11, 12, 13, 27, 36).

CONCLUSION

These and many other 19th century warnings are almost completely ignored by those who are defending the modern versions today. In fact, very few even know that such warnings were given, and if they do know of them in some vague sense, they know of them only through the false caricatures that have been given by a Bruce Metzger or a Kurt Aland or a James White or a Donald Carson and have not carefully, prayerfully studied the warnings for themselves.

To say that the defense of the King James Bible is something new, that it was invented in the 20th century by a Seventh-day Adventist or a carnally-mouthed, cultic, thrice-divorced pastor, or a female preacher who is caught in her own web of conspiracies and

who abuses anyone who contradicts her is to hide the truth. I am convinced that this is a game played by men who do not want to look at the real issues.

My friends, don't be put off by the ridicule that has been heaped upon the heads of those who defend the King James Bible and by the misleading designation "King James Only." And don't look at the issue second hand; look at the issue for yourself.

In my opinion, the best starting place is *THE KING JAMES BIBLE DEFENDED* by Edward F. Hills, who had a doctorate in textual criticism from Harvard. He wrote the first edition of this book in the 1950s. It is available from Bible for Today, 900 Park Ave., Collingswood, NJ 08108, 800-564-6109.

Three other good places to start are the following: *TOUCH NOT THE UNCLEAN THING* by Dr. David Sorenson (Northstar Baptist Ministries, 1820 West Morgan Street, Duluth, MN 55811, 218-726-0209). And *SEVENTY-FIVE PROBLEMS WITH CENTRAL BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY'S BOOK "THE BIBLE VERSION DEBATE"* by Lloyd Streeter (First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1043, LaSalle, IL 61301, fbc-1pc@core.comm.net). And *THREE HUNDRED FIFTY-SIX DOCTRINAL ERRORS IN THE NIV AND OTHER MODERN BIBLE VERSIONS* by Jack Moorman (Bible for Today, 900 Park Ave., Collingswood, NJ 08108, 800-564-6109, www.BibleForToday.org).

I have been studying this issue for 25 years and have found it to be spiritually edifying in the highest degree and a great fortifier of my faith in God and my confidence in the Bible. The bare bibliography of the books and articles I have in my personal library on this subject is 60 pages long. I have read roughly 600 books and booklets and 2,000 articles, but I learn new things in this field almost every day.

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